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## **Retracing the film material history of the German Democratic Republic**

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# FILMCOLORS – AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH ([HTTPS://FILMCOL ORS.ORG](https://filmcolors.org/))



RETRACING THE  
FILM MATERIAL  
HISTORY OF THE  
GERMAN  
DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC

By Josephine Diecke (<https://www.film.uzh.ch/de/team/drittmittel/diecke.html>), SNSF Film Colors. Technologies, Cultures, Institutions (<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p21276.htm>), Department of Film Studies, University of Zurich



On several occasions over the past eighteen months, I have been fortunate to get in touch with the film history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on a little-known but highly meaningful territory. In the framework of my dissertation project *Film Colors. Technologies, Cultures, Institutions* (<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p21276.htm>), funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and led by Barbara Flueckiger, I take a close look at the color film stock manufacturers in multiple sociopolitical and cultural contexts during the second half of the twentieth century and thus during the era of the so-called 'Cold War'.

## Cooperation with the DEFA Foundation

The main actor in Socialist film production in the GDR was the Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA). It was established even before the founding of the GDR and shaped German film production crucially as the only state-owned film studio in East Germany's history. Today, DEFA's films are also part of the history of unified Germany and are thus held at the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv in Berlin-Hoppegarten. The institution responsible for this unique collection is the guardian successor of the state-controlled film studio, the DEFA Foundation (<http://www.defa-stiftung.de/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=1356>). They

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The DEFA Foundation is an incorporated non-profit foundation with its seat in Berlin. It was established by the Federal Government of Germany on December 15, 1998. DEFA film stocks, considered an important part of Germany's cultural heritage, were assigned to the DEFA Foundation as capital for Foundation operations. It is the mission of the DEFA Foundation to preserve the 12,000 films made at the East German DEFA studios, to use them for the public good and in general to support and sponsor German film culture and art.

The cooperation between our research projects ERC Advanced Grant *FilmColors* (<https://filmcolors.org/>), SNSF *Film Colors. Cultures, Technologies, Institutions* and the DEFA Foundation started in 2016 with a request from our side and was consolidated by the DEFA Foundation's immediate and great support in terms of providing DVDs, Blu-ray discs and high resolution files for our analysis of historical color films. The analysis workflow consists of a film annotation tool and a custom-made FileMaker database, as have been described by Barbara Flueckiger (2018a; 2018b). In addition, we strengthened our professional relationship by exchanging mutual research questions and organizing a case study for digitization that we have executed during the last months.

Part of the DEFA Foundation's film package was a wide range of movies, produced between 1950 and 1984. The selection included some popular feature films such as *Das kalte Herz* (*The Cold Heart*, GDR 1950, Paul Verhoeven), *Chingachgook – Die grosse Schlange* (*Chingachgook – The Great Snake*, GDR 1967, Richard Groschopp) and *Jakob der Lügner* (*Jacob the Liar*, GDR 1974, Frank Beyer), as well as also two documentaries with *Freundschaft siegt* (GDR 1951, Iwan Pyrjew) and *Friedensfahrt 1952 Warschau – Berlin – Prag* (GDR 1952, Joris Ivens). Other titles belong to the entertainment genres of comedies and musicals, such as *Revue um Mitternacht* (*Midnight Revue*, GDR 1962, Gottfried Kolditz), *Heisser Sommer* (*Hot Summer*, GDR 1968, Joachim Hasler) and *Du und ich und Klein-Paris* (*You And I And "Little" Paris*, GDR 1971, Werner Wolfgang Wallroth). Hans Kratzert's *Wir kaufen eine Feuerwehr* (*Let's Buy A Fire Engine*, GDR 1970) and Herrmann Zschoche's *Philipp, der Kleine* (*Philipp the Small*, GDR 1975) represent the popular category of children's films.

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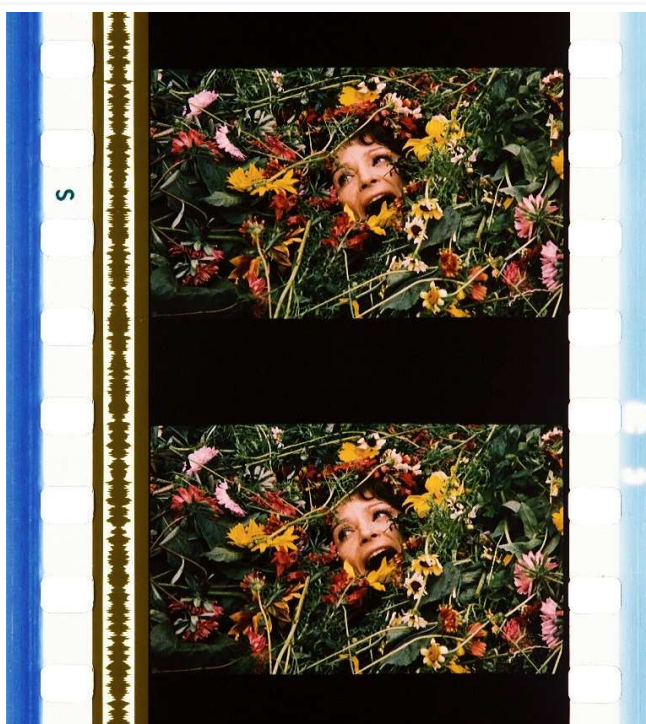
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Die Legende von Paul und Paula (GDR 1973, Heiner Carow). Credit: Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv. Photographs of the Orwocolor print by Josephine Diecke, SNSF project Film

## Research visits in Berlin and Wolfen

The next step, after analyzing and contextualizing these already digitally available items, was to trace them back to their analog origins. For this purpose, I set off to Berlin and Wolfen (federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, Germany) to consult the analog relics of the film production history of the GDR.

The technological process closely connected to this historical period is the chromogenic monopack (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1351/>). It belongs to the mimetic, subtractive processes and has the major advantage of enabling shooting with a standardized camera as used for black and white film materials. This means that, unlike previous mimetic color processes such as Technicolor No. IV, no special equipment was needed. In 1936, the German company Agfa, part of the IG Farben conglomerate, presented the first negative / positive process to the chromogenic color film stock market by introducing the celebrated Agfacolor (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1276/>). The headquarter in Wolfen continued its raw stock production almost immediately after World War II for the communist nations. Simultaneously, the Agfacolor patents – that were previously kept in secrecy – were published, for instance by the Combined Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee (CIOS) and the British Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee (BIOS). They put the technological secrets of Agfa in the public record and therefore promoted their subsequent use, in the form of other chromogenic color derivatives such as Ferraniacolor (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1312/>), Ansco Color (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1313/>), Sovcolor (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1316/>) and Gevacolor (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1308/#/>). From 1945 until 1964, a newly constructed film production plant in Leverkusen (in the West German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia) and the original one in Wolfen coexisted under the same name, Agfa. In 1964, Wolfen sold all the rights for the Agfa brand to Leverkusen and changed the company's name to ORWO (an acronym for 'Original WOlfen') and the name of the color film products to Orwocolor (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1315/>).

The Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv has been of great assistance by providing the film materials, paper clippings and other historical documents belonging to DEFA's film history. To inspect and document the deposited color film negatives and positives, Prof. Flueckiger and I used the repro camera set-up she prepared while focusing especially on vintage film prints. Their immediately accessible color appearance and the edge information reveal a lot about the individual characteristics and origins of various color film processes. In contrast to the different camera negatives, the available print represents a coherent color-corrected version, which enables the consideration of a film material's specific properties relevant to the film's integrity as an artwork. In case of heavy dye fading or when printed edge marks are missing, we often consider going back to the available negatives as well. The galleries on the *Timeline of Historical FilmColors* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/>) reflect the diversity of chromogenic film stocks which we have encountered during our research. Until now, our fruitful collaboration has generated 23 galleries ([http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/filter/?\\_sft\\_ubercategory=defa-foundation&post\\_types=gallery](http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/filter/?_sft_ubercategory=defa-foundation&post_types=gallery)) of 21 DEFA productions. In many cases, the material findings have matched our prior expectations regarding the film stock employed. This was the case for example for the Agfacolor release prints of *Das singende, klingende Bäumchen* ([http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/das-singende-klingende-baumchen-1957/?\\_sft\\_ubercategory=defa-foundation&post\\_types=gallery](http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/das-singende-klingende-baumchen-1957/?_sft_ubercategory=defa-foundation&post_types=gallery)) (*The Singing, Ringing Tree*, GDR 1957, Francesco Stefani), *Der schweigende Stern* ([http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/der-schweigende-stern-1960/?\\_sft\\_ubercategory=defa-foundation&post\\_types=gallery](http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/der-schweigende-stern-1960/?_sft_ubercategory=defa-foundation&post_types=gallery)) (GDR 1960, Kurt Maetzig) and *Ballett Africana* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/ballett-africana-nationales-ensemble-der-republik-guinea-1963/>) (GDR 1963, Wolfgang E. Struck). Most of the other films were shot or printed on the color film stock Orwocolor. As noted, this brand had replaced the former Agfacolor film material from the East German plant in Wolfen after the Agfa trademark was sold to the West German branch in Leverkusen in 1964. Amongst the photographed selection of East German Agfacolor and Orwocolor (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1315/>) prints, famous titles such as *Die Geschichte vom kleinen Muck* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/die-geschichte-vom-kleinen-muck-1953/>) (*The Story of Little Muck*, GDR 1953, Wolfgang Staudte), *Ernst Thälmann – Führer seiner Klasse* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/ernst-thalman-fuhrer-seiner-klasse-1955/>) (*Ernst Thaelmann – Leader Of The Working Class*, GDR 1955, Kurt Maetzig) and *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/die-legende-von-paul-und-paula-1973/>) (*The Legend of Paul and Paula*, GDR 1972, Heiner Carow) are to be found. The later added title sequence of the originally complete Agfacolor nitrate negative of *Die Störenfriede* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/die-storenfriede-1953-3/>) (*The Trouble Makers*, GDR 1953, Wolfgang Schleif) and its intermediate positive have been preserved on masked Eastmancolor film stocks. The biggest challenge was to decode the Kodak film stock edge marks of the positive materials. This results for instance from overlapping (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/das-madchen-aus-dem-fahrstuhl-1991-#/image/17708>) and therefore hardly readable or even completely illegible (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/die-schonste-1957-#/image/17723>) writings, hidden under colored borders. Nevertheless, we could link the film prints of *Die Schönste* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/die-schonste-1957/>) (GDR 1957, Ernesto Remani, Walter Beck), *Revue um Mitternacht* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/revue-um-mitternacht-1962/>) (*Midnight Revue*, GDR 1962, Gottfried Kolditz) and *Das*



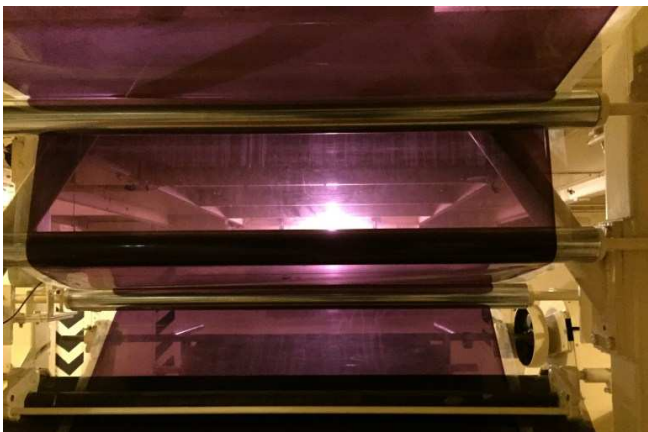


Revue um Mitternacht (GDR 1962, Gottfried Kolditz). Credit: Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv.  
Photographs of the Special Order Print Film SO-886 by Josephine Diecke, SNSF project  
Film Colors. Technologies, Cultures, Institutions.

Exploring the history of the chromogenic color film stock generations of Agfacolor and Orwocolor thus meant searching for archival films as well as non-film sources. A large quantity of contemporary research records and production notes can be found in the impressively comprehensive holdings of the Bundesarchiv and the Industrie- und Filmmuseum Wolfen. Whereas the former institution is known for its archives and research facilities, the museum in Wolfen is still a sort of treasure trove for every scholar interested in industry and technology studies. During several research visits, I had the chance to delve into the networks and erstwhile secrets of color film and stock production in Germany and into its interrelation with other countries and companies. Building on a number of encounters with the DEFA Foundation, during which we deliberated about the specific material characteristics of Agfacolor and Orwocolor, we decided to meet in person in Wolfen with two representatives of the DEFA Foundation, Melanie Hauth (digitization and restoration) and Franziska Schuster (freelancing project management and restoration). Together we went through selected documents and magazines of the museum's former company archive and library. With the kind assistance of the extremely knowledgeable and patient archivist Manfred Gill, we went through the corridors and halls of the museum's historic building and thus through the history of the Filmfabrik Wolfen. The Industrie- und Filmmuseum Wolfen (<http://www.ifm-wolfen.de/de/>)'s own series of articles and papers *Die Filmfabrik Wolfen – Aus der Geschichte* monitors the history of the former Agfa/ORWO plant and its personalities. If you should have the chance to visit Wolfen, you should stop by for a museum tour or one of the regularly organized screening events of vintage prints of DEFA films.



Film stock production at Industrie- und Filmmuseum Wolfen. Photo by Barbara Flueckiger





Film stock production at Industrie- und Filmmuseum Wolfen. Photo by Barbara Flueckiger

### Digitization Case Study *Lea aus dem Süden*

As a result of our mutual requests and exchanges, the DEFA Foundation agreed to help us prepare a case study for digitization and physical measurements. Since our *FilmColors* projects at the University of Zurich aim at investigating such material and archival sources, and since we do our research on a non-profit basis with the intention to gather new insights and improve digitization and restoration workflows, we usually ask the archives for short films or short excerpts from a feature film. Following this call, the DEFA Foundation suggested a film title which was previously entirely unknown to us. *Das Film-Magazin Nr. 4, Teil 2 – Lea aus dem Süden* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/lea-aus-dem-suden-1963/>) is a short musical film in colour, shot in 1963 by DEFA under the direction of Gottfried Kolditz and photographed by Erich Gusko.



*Das Film-Magazin Nr. 4, Teil 2 – Lea aus dem Süden* (GDR 1963, Gottfried Kolditz).  
Credit: DEFA Foundation. Photograph of the Agfacolor Safety Print by Barbara Flueckiger.

The fictional action takes place in the same year, 1963, in East Berlin, and thus on the territory of the German Democratic Republic. The GDR was founded as a communist state in 1949 and existed until German reunification in 1990. The short film revolves around the famous Bulgarian singer Lea Ivanova and her fellow musicians from the Eddy Kazassian Combo. They are invited to perform at the Friedrichstadt-Palast, a popular venue at the time. After overcoming the initial road traffic risks, they can start with their rehearsal. The rest of the film is a succession of popular songs – in German called ‘Schlager’ – in Bulgarian and German. We follow Lea through different staged settings while witnessing her unconditional love for the unreliable Konstantin and are invited to join in on a sort of retail therapy after the wedding.

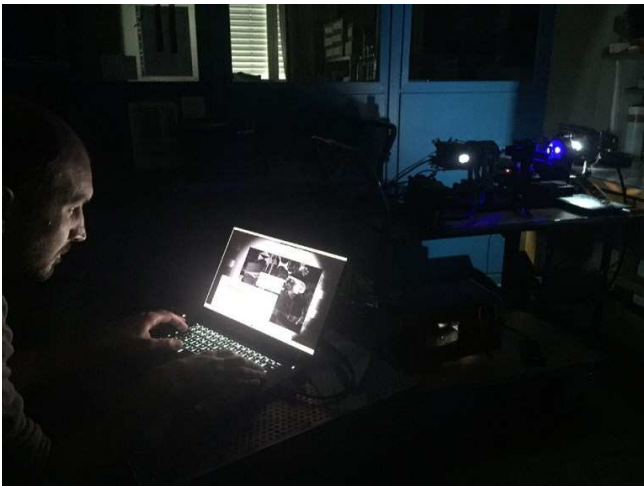
In 1959, DEFA established their state-controlled production unit system for economic reasons. Seven of the so-called “Künstlerische Arbeitsgruppen (KAG)” belonged to the DEFA-Spielfilmstudio (studio for feature films). “Das Stacheltier”, which was responsible for the production of *Lea aus dem Süden*, was one of these units. The “Stacheltier” (hedgehog) corresponds to the production unit’s metaphorical role as a satirical commentator on society. The unit produced for the most part short films with pointed remarks and a satirical tone. The so-called “Film-Magazin” consisted of such a series of short films, within which the case study *Lea aus dem Süden* was made. It was introduced in 1960 as a series of multiple short films that should entertain the public and were planned to precede the main film at the cinemas and other alternative venues. At the same time, the film magazine represented a kind of finger exercise for filmmakers before taking on bigger projects, as was also the case for Gottfried Kolditz.





Josephine Diecke, SNSF project *Film Colors. Technologies, Cultures, Institutions: Socialist Identity in the Making: Lea aus dem Süden* (Gottfried Kolditz, GDR 1963) between *French Chic, Socialist Values and Consumer Culture at the Third International Conference Colour in Film in London* (<https://thethirdinternationalconfer2018.sched.com/event/DH7X/socialist-identity-in-the-making-lea-aus-dem-suden-gottfried-kolditz-gdr-1963-between-french-chic-socialist-values-and-consumer-culture>), March 2018.  
Photograph by Martin Weiss.

Thanks to the cooperation with the DEFA Foundation, we have been able to digitize three different source materials: the original camera negative (OBN), one intermediate negative (IMN) and one combined projection print (KKP). Barbara Flueckiger and I photographed the camera negative and the projection print with our repro-set-up (see gallery here (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/lea-aus-dem-suden-1963/>)). Following this step, our restorer Martin Weiss conducted the digitization process of all three source materials with our research project's Kinetta film scanner with 5K RGB camera, with which the entire film width was captured. Problematic sequences were stabilized in Diamant. Finally, the films were played out in Resolve. For each film 2k DCPs and HD preview files were created, both in full width and cropped to image area. All data is finally backed up twice to LTO-6. Furthermore, our research scientist Dr. Giorgio Trumpy used this case study to perform his multispectral imaging technique to obtain colorimetric images as a reference for the color correction of the scanned materials and to investigate the optical properties of the items. In the near future, we will conduct more tests with our own equipment in order to bridge the gap between the material properties of different chromogenic film stocks and their reproducibility in digital formats.



Multispectral imaging by research scientist Giorgio Trumpy. Photograph by Josephine Diecke.



## Acknowledgement

In concluding, I would like to thank the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv for providing the film material and the DEFA Foundation for the outstanding collaboration, which was made possible by Dr. Ralf Schenk (director), Melanie Hauth (digitization and restoration), Anne Möller (photo documentation/film and video equipment), Juliane Hasse (public relations/IT), and above all Stephanie Eckert (consulting and representation of the board) and Franziska Schuster (freelancing project management and restoration). They have been a great help and support to our projects by acting as the complete opposite of a gatekeeper in the archival world. Furthermore, a warm thank you to Barbara Barlet (research) and Doris Hackbarth (archive), who provided the foundation for this research with their open and welcoming personalities and their hands-on experience.

Another invaluable source and facilitator were and still are the employees of the Industrie- und Filmmuseum Wolfen, including Uwe Holz (museum director), Magdalena Manthey (museum education), Andrea Mähl (public relations, exhibitions, events), Daniela Wenzel (administration) and particularly Manfred Gill (archive, library) who patiently guided me through their enormous holdings. Together, they represent a unique organization and I very much hope that they can continue their work and mission in the coming years and decades.

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